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SURVEY OF NIE DISSEMINATION AND USE

Prepared by the
Board of National Estimates
Central Intelligence Agency

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PREFACE

This Survey of NIE Dissemination^{1/} and Use was initially suggested by the Board of National Estimates, which believed that in the light of four years' experience with the production of National Intelligence Estimates, it was worthwhile to conduct an informal survey of the use which various consumers outside the intelligence community itself made of NIE's. The Director of Central Intelligence proposed that the Board undertake such a survey and report its findings to the IAC (IAC-D-94). The IAC concurred in this procedure on 1 March 1955 (IAC-M-186, 1 March 1955).

The survey was conducted by the Board of National Estimates in cooperation with the IAC agencies, in two stages. The first stage was a written questionnaire to all offices and agencies receiving NIE's which was designed to reveal the extent to which these estimates received further dissemination within each agency. The results are summarized in Part I (see Tab A for a list of those participating).

^{1/} Dissemination is used herein to mean the delivery of the printed NIE, i. e., direct dissemination.

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The second stage was a series of interviews with a representative sample of final consumers^{2/} to ascertain what use they actually made of NIE's. Members and representatives of the Board of National Estimates interviewed more than 75 representative end-users in all receiving departments, offices, and agencies except the Department of the Navy, and the Department of Defense (see Tab B for those interviewed). ONI and the Joint Intelligence Group preferred that sample inquiries or interviews addressed to those consumers to whom they disseminated NIE's be conducted by them (see Tab C for a list of offices contacted). Because of differing methods and this division of responsibility for the second stage, the results did not prove wholly comparable. In addition to the interviews in Washington, letter inquiries were sent by the appropriate IAC agencies to representative consumers outside of Washington (see Tab D for list of those contacted by letter). The results of the second stage of the survey are summarized in Parts II and III.

^{2/} "Final Consumer" and "end-users" are used to mean a senior or responsible officer at the receiving agency who might use national intelligence in the discharge of his duties. The survey did not cover the extensive use of NIE's within the intelligence community.

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The following limitations on the survey should be borne in mind:

a. It was not designed to obtain opinions regarding
the adequacy of NIE content or judgments on possible changes
to make NIE's more useful.

*not
content*

b. The number of valid over-all generalizations that
can be made is limited by the variations in the survey coverage
of the agencies and departments, the different types of NIE's,
and the uses to which they are put.

The primary goal of the survey was the limited one of establishing the
distribution pattern of NIE's and of shedding light on the kinds of uses
to which they are put.

The cut-off date for information on which this report is based
was 20 April 1956.

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CONCLUSIONS

1. An average of 249 NIE's^{3/} are distributed on a regular basis to the White House, the National Security Council, the Operations Coordinating Board, and the major departments and agencies with national security responsibilities. Many of these are further distributed to major commands and missions outside Washington, both overseas and in the US. Selected NIE's go to the US Information Agency, the Federal Civil Defense Agency, the Department of Commerce,

25X1

25X1

2. In most of these agencies, nearly all NIE's are distributed to offices with over-all responsibilities in the national security field, and selected NIE's are disseminated to lower echelons with narrower responsibilities on a need-to-know basis. NIE's also receive substantial indirect dissemination in most agencies through being incorporated, attributed or unattributed, in staff briefings memoranda, or in materials assembled for work on specific problems.

^{3/} Number of Top Secret NIE's distributed is less; see footnote 4 on page 10.

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3. Most top-level executives (the President and Department or Agency heads) see only the relatively few NIE's which are selected for them by their intelligence and screening officers, and then they usually read only the conclusions, briefs, or selected portions. The exceptions are most likely to be those NIE's dealing with crisis situations requiring urgent and high-level policy decisions.

4. However, NIE's are extensively read by second and third echelon officials in the White House staff and in the NSC and OCB staffs, which require coordinated national intelligence in dealing with national security problems which transcend the interests of a single agency or department.

5. NIE's are also used in major departments and agencies by various staffs responsible for national security planning and execution. The extent of use tends to vary according to the applicability and timeliness of a given NIE to the problem at hand, the user's access to alternative or complementary sources of intelligence, and the degree to which the users are concerned with problems transcending the interests of their respective departments or agencies.

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6. However, aside from possible indirect dissemination, it appears that some NIE's do not reach all of the departmental policy or planning levels or other key officials who might find them useful. Some of those interviewed indicated that they had not seen particular NIE's which appeared pertinent to their responsibilities. In some instances, this appeared to result from the failure of those in their immediate offices to pass the NIE's on to their chiefs; in others, the criteria for distribution appeared to be overly restrictive.

7. Although a number of NIE's are used in working on specific planning and policy problems, they are more generally used for background purposes. In addition, the distribution of the collective judgments of the intelligence community at nearly all levels of the government performs a function that is important, though quantitatively difficult to measure, in facilitating both the formulation and execution of national security policy.

8. The majority of NIE users interviewed indicated that the format and problem coverage of NIE's are generally adequate for their purposes, though many expressed dissatisfaction with certain aspects

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of some NIE's. The survey obtained such expressions of opinion only as a by-product, and there is not sufficient evidence to serve as a basis for recommending changes.

9. Some of the limitations on NIE use mentioned in the survey include:

a. Some NIE's are too long to permit their being read in full by top-level executives, and even by some interested executives in the support echelons.

b. On the other hand, the generality of some NIE's limits their usefulness, especially to lower echelons responsible for detailed foreign policy planning and execution.

c. Some NIE's are not relevant or timely enough for use in working on specific policy problems.

d. Some officials feel that if NIE's placed more emphasis on the consequence of US courses of action they would be of more use in weighing the advantages or disadvantages of various alternative courses open to the US.

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